



The Forgotten Mourner: Supporting Children in their Grief

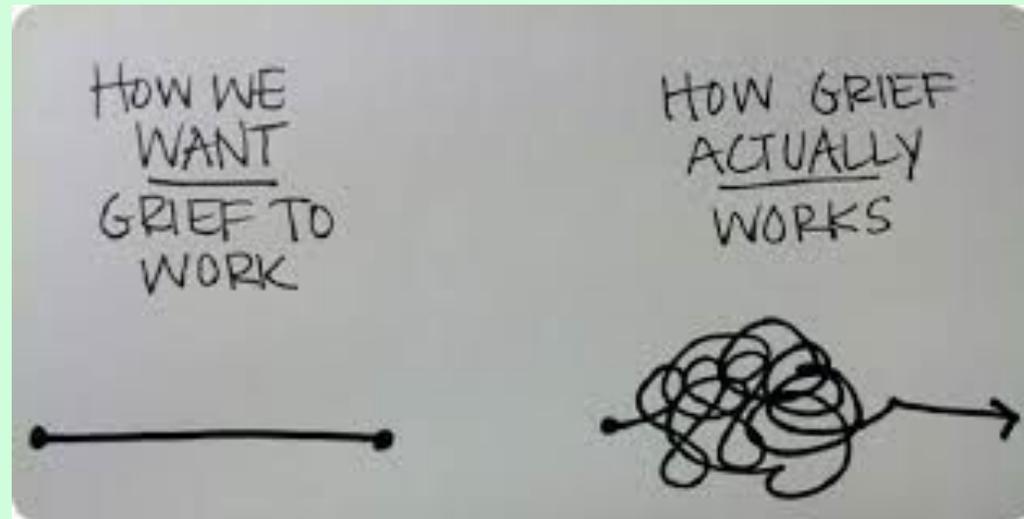
Jill Englar, LCSW-C

Tara O'Donnell,
CCLS

Lisa D. L.

Change —> loss —> grief

- natural **process** as opposed to an event
- individual



key characteristics of developmentally appropriate grief responses in children

age 3-5y

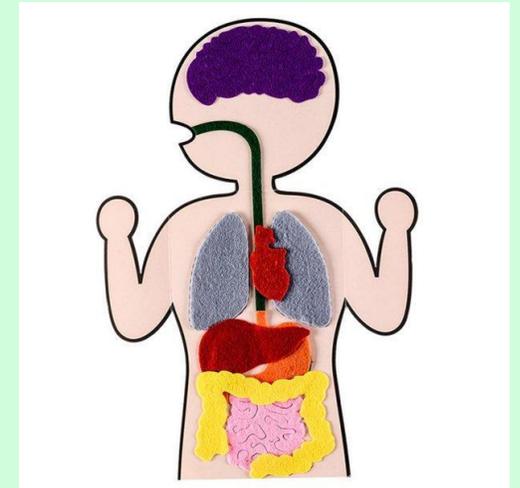
- magical thinking
- believe death temporary
- believe death reversible
- repeat their story



key characteristics of developmentally appropriate grief responses in children

age 6-8y

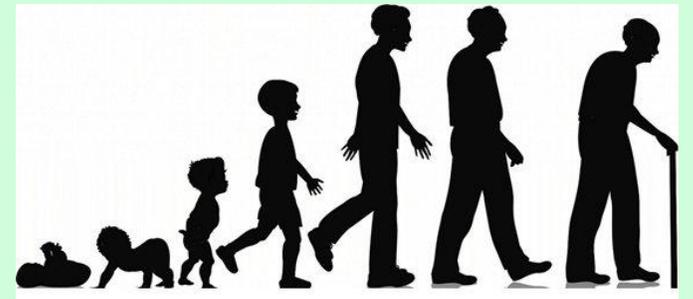
- start to understand finality
- start to understand irreversibility
- may fear death
- many questions
- curious / interested in physical details
- magical thinking continues, although lessens



key characteristics of developmentally appropriate grief responses in children

age 9-12y

- finality
- irreversibility
- inevitability
- may view as punishment
- some magical thinking remains
- curious / interested in physical details



key characteristics of developmentally appropriate grief responses in children

age 13-18y

- finality
- irreversibility
- inevitability
- universality — but won't happen to them
- may worry about own death
- avoid conversations about death



▪ fear of appearing different from peers

Compare how grief manifests in children as compared to adults

a child needs to:

- LEARN to mourn
- be informed
- say goodbye
- work out feelings, be encouraged to display
- be reassured of safety and day-to-day care
- ask questions



Risks

when a child is unaware, not included, unprepared:

- complicated grief
- school aversion
- damage to familial relationships
- substance abuse
- depression



grief related to time



anticipatory grief – BEFORE a loss (ex. upon diagnosis, admission to hospice service)



- school age child, father the pt: could no longer take camping trips, go fishing
- teen, mother the patient: mother no longer present in the home, transportation challenges made it difficult to visit
- young adult, teen, school age siblings, grandmother the pt: no longer awake / aware to converse, no longer able to attend their events / performances



Grief along loved one's journey

- preschool siblings, mother the pt: normalization, individualized attention while spouse provided care to pt or rested, foster developmentally appropriate understanding
- teen, mother the patient: spent quiet time at the bedside when she visited; verbalized afterward that she did not want / need care team constantly hovering
- teen siblings, father the pt: level of disengagement as a coping mechanism



Bereavement – AFTER a loss

- school age child, father the pt: relatives available, travel over holiday shortly after death, photo memory book, photo pillow
- school age child, father the pt: sharing many photos and videos, travel over holiday shortly after death
- young teen, father the pt: difficulty returning to school, plan to wear father's FitBit
- teen, mother the patient: has found various photos, a note from mother, reflection on family dynamics

child life support

direct support from child life specialist to child

- encourage / join with child in remembering and honoring loved one
- read books related to grief



consultation of child life specialist with parent / guardian

- affirm their love / support for child
- developmentally appropriate language to use
- support avenues at school
- empower family to take the family time that they need

developmentally appropriate support
for children

PREPARATION

POWER



preparation

- for a visit
- for viewing, wake, funeral, service, burial

What to include?

- what they might see and hear
- what they CAN do
- ‘back up plan’
- availability to answer any questions

Language

- simple
- direct
- brief
- TRUTH



Power

- to choose level of participation
- to change their mind on the spot
- to feel and express whatever feelings they are feeling

Why is this important?

- can lead to further trauma for child if not offered
- regret
- lack of closure
- lack of trust in adults

Check for understanding

- listen to child
- encourage to express feelings
- respond to questions



RESILIENCE

can be maximized through:

- developmentally appropriate preparation
- the power to make choices



resources for families

Websites

What's Your Grief organization: blog, articles, webinars, brochures

<https://whatsyourgrief.com>

In the Community

Youth Bureau

hospice team

child life specialist at a local hospital

school guidance counselor



Children's Books

The Next Place by Warren Hanson

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

Ida Always by Caron Levis and Charles Santoso

I Miss You: A First Look at Death by Pat Thomas

You've Got Dragons by Kathryn Cave

Why Do I Feel So Sad? by Tracy Lambert-Prater

When Someone Dies by Andrea Dorn

The Sad Dragon by Steve Herman

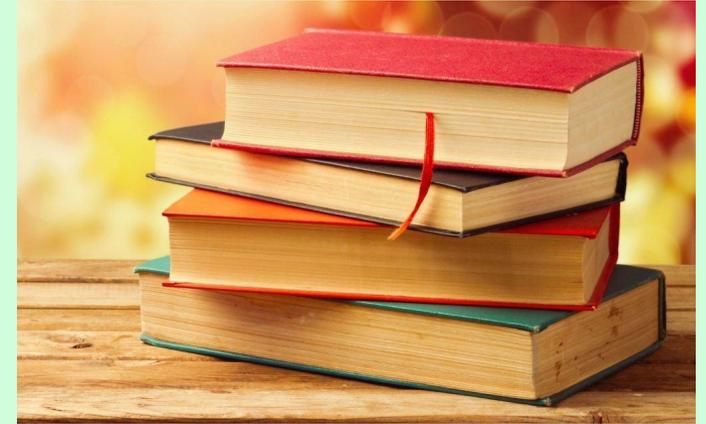
Where Are You: A Children's Book about Loss by Jeffery Olsen and Spencer Olsen

My Yellow Balloon by Tiffany Papageorge

I'll Always Love You by Hans Wilhelm

Heaven is for Real for kids by Todd Burpo and Sonja Burpo

The Memory Box by Joanna Rowland



Concluding thoughts

- children, teens, young adults grieve, and it is important to **encourage** them to do so
- **preparation** is key for a child / teen — simple, direct language to avoid confusion
- **power** to choose means / level of engagement
- utilize **child life** support when you have access, or collaborate
- direct families to **resources** for more information and ideas
- children, teens, young adults are **resilient**



Questions / discussion



References

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. *Grief and Children*.

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Grief-008.aspx

Cassini, Rogers. *See This Child*. Excerpt from DEATH AND THE CLASSROOM. Griefwork Cincinnati.

Cedar Valley Hospice. *The Eucalyptus Tree: A Program of Cedar Valley Hospice*. Waterloo, Iowa.

Clandos, R., Kemp M.A., G., Jaffe Ph.D, J., Segal Ph.D, J. *Coping with Divorce: Helping Your Child Cope with Separation or Divorce*. www.helpguide.org

Department of Pastoral Care Fredrick Memorial Healthcare System. Fredrick, MD. *The Grief Journey with Children*.

Ehmke, R. (2023). *Helping Children Deal With Grief*. Child Mind Institute.

<https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-deal-grief/>

Ele's Place. *How to Help a Grieving Child*. Greater, Lansing, MI. www.elesplace.org

Gurian Ph. D. *Talking About Job Loss with Kids – How, When and What*. www.aboutourkids.org

Haley, E., & Williams, L. (2023). *Supporting Grieving Children [Webinar]. What's Your Grief?*.

<https://app.ce-go.com/supporting-grieving-children-a-primer-for-professionals>

References continued

Hospice: Talking to Children about Death. www.hospicenet.org

Jewett- Jarratt, C. (1982). *Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss.* The Harvard Common Press. Boston, Massachusetts.

Lister, E., & Schwartzman, M. (2022). *Giving hope: Conversations with children about illness, death, and loss.* Avery.

Parker, W. *The Effects of Divorce on Children and How to Cope: Why Children are Impacted by Divorce.* www.fatherhood.about.com

Siegel, Dr.S. *Developmental Issues of Grieving Children and How to Help.* The Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC).

Torbic, H. (2011). Children and grief: But what about the children?. *Home Healthcare Nurse*, 29(2), 67-77.

Wolfelt Ph.D, Alan. *Helping Children Cope with Grief.* www.griefwords.com